

#230 ORVILLE ETHIER: USS *WARD*

John Martini (JM): Today is December 8, 1991. This is an oral history tape with Mr. Orville Ethier. On December 7, 1941, Mr. Ethier was a Machinist's Mate Second Class, aboard the destroyer, USS *WARD*. He was twenty years old at that time. This oral history tape is taking place at the Waikiki Park Hotel, in Honolulu. I'm John Martini from the National Park Service and this tape is done in conjunction with the USS *ARIZONA* Memorial and with television station KHET in Honolulu. And thank you for sitting through the long intro. Thanks for coming today.

Mr. Ethier, how did you, how did you get into the U.S. Navy?

Orville Ethier (OE): Well, I was still in high school in St. Paul, Minnesota when one of my friends joined the United States Naval Reserve, so I went down with 'em one night and watched them in their training and I had just passed my seventeenth birthday, and at that time, you could join the reserves at seventeen, with your parents' consent. Otherwise, you had to be eighteen. So I was seventeen years old and I decided to join the 47th division of the United States Naval Reserve in St. Paul, Minnesota. And I was in the reserves for two years before we were called on active duty in January of 1941.

I cruised on the Great Lakes on the USS *WILMINGTON*, a gunboat out of Chicago, in 1939. And I cruised on the USS *PADUCAH* in the summer of 1940. And then that fall, Congress declared an emergency and we were called to active duty.

So I went into the active Navy, with the 47th division from St. Paul, Minnesota. There were eighty-two of us and we became the major part of the crew on the USS *WARD*.

JM: You told me earlier that you met up with the *WARD* for the first time at Mare Island?

OE: In San Diego.

JM: In San Diego.

OE: We put it in commission in San Diego and we had two shakedown cruises, and then we were ordered to Mare Island for final fitting and supplying of the ship, and from there, to Pearl Harbor, to become part of destroyer division with the duty of patrolling the harbor entrance at Pearl Harbor. And there were four ships in that division, the USS *CHEW*, the *SCHLEY*, the *ALLEN*, and the *WARD*.

JM: When you first went to sea on the *WARD*, what your impression of being on a four-piper destroyer? How did she handle in the sea and what were your, what were your competitions like?

OE: Well, we didn't realize that it was considered such an old, beat-up ship. It, it was in pretty good shape. It had all been cleaned up and painted and everything worked good and we had a lot of new equipment on it. And actually, we turned over about thirty-five knots on our seabound cruise.

JM: Did you, was she a wet ship? Was it a heavy sea?

OE: Oh, all the four-stackers were, I guess. We only had about maybe six to eight feet free board on it. About eight feet forward and six feet aft.

JM: Had you, had a couple of shakedown cruises and then final fitting and then it was all the way to Pearl Harbor?

OE: Right.

JM: How long did it take?

OE: Well, we ran on some rough weather and it took us six days.

JM: How did you like Pearl Harbor as a duty station? How did, you know, how did, how was Honolulu as a Navy town?

OE: Before the war?

JM: Yeah.

OE: It was wonderful.

JM: Yeah?

OE: I used to ride horses around Diamond Head. There was a stable right, just before you got to Diamond Head, as you were traveling out Waikiki, and one of the other fellows on the ship and I liked horses from back when. So we went horseback riding around Diamond Head.

JM: Did you and the other three ships that took turns patrolling the harbor entrance, like how long would you be out and how long would you be in, in general?

OE: We were usually out a week and then we were either in a week or we went to some other island for a week, and then we'd come back and be on patrol again. So we traveled around some of the other islands. On Memorial Day of 1941, before the war, they wanted some Navy personnel for a parade at Kaunakakai, Molokai. So we were designated one of the ships to go over there and we were in a parade on Memorial Day in 1941, at Kaunakakai.

JM: So, and most of the guys aboard the ship, eighty-two you said, were from St. Paul?

OE: St. Paul, Minnesota.

JM: I usually ask everybody how they spent their last night before the attack, December 6. You were on duty that day, weren't you?

OE: Yes. We were on the sixth, but on the fifth, we were relieved and came in and we were supposed to have our weekend. But we came in on the fifth to change command on the *WARD*. We had a new skipper, William W. Outerbridge. And he took over from Hunter Wood, Jr., who was also a lieutenant. And W. W. Outerbridge had just come from China, in China duty, so he had been on more or less war time type patrols in China, just before he came and took command of the *WARD*. And the *WARD* was his first command, and he took it over on December

5. He was supposed to have at least the week in port to get used to his new command, but something happened to the USS *SCHLEY*, mechanical problems. And the *SCHLEY* had to be relieved, so they ordered the *WARD* out on patrol with the new skipper, his being the port of that day. So we went out on the fifth, and he had the sixth, which is Saturday, to go over a few of the regular things that we do with the ship, you know, general drills and that. And then, the morning of the seventh, of course, the Japanese attacked. So he only had a command for two days before he had to make a big decision.

JM: In those days just before the war, was a lot of emphasis put on anti-submarine patrol work?

OE: For the first six or seven months, from January to about November, we were on just a regular patrol, mainly just to keep all other craft out of the area, between Honolulu and Barbers Point.

JM: The defensive scenario?

OE: The defensive scenario was being used by the Navy for practice runs and all types of activity, and so they didn't want any merchant craft in there at all. Any merchant marine ships that were going to pull into Honolulu from that direction had to go out to sea and come into Honolulu from the Diamond Head direction, because the Navy would hold that as their practice area.

JM: Did you do a lot of gunnery practice?

OE: Yes, we did gunnery practice both with the fifty calibers and with the one pounder that we had.

JM: On the -- describe the morning of December 7.

OE: At four o'clock in the morning, the USS *CONDOR*, a mine sweeper, spotted a periscope and reported immediately to the *WARD* and to Pearl Harbor that they had spotted a submarine periscope out there and of course we, right away, went to check it out because we were supposed to know any time any ship was in that area. And there were no submarines scheduled to come in or out that morning. So we had a sounding on the submarine.

JM: A sonar?

OE: Sonar sounding on it, but we lost it. He got into the shallow water up towards Barbers Point. We lost 'em and when we reported this in, they thought we had sounded a school of fish or something, because they didn't accept the report. So we secured from general quarters, went back to bunking in, until seven in the morning, when we had general quarters again, and we were all griping, this new skipper was sure giving us a workout. But this time, our lookout had spotted this periscope following a barge that was being towed by the *ANTARES*, and they were about to enter the harbor entrance. And that's when Lieutenant Outerbridge was called to the bridge and they took one look at it, and the OD of the deck says, "What are we going to do about it?"

And he says, "We're going to shoot at it. We're going to sink it. If it's not supposed to be there, then my orders are that no craft is supposed to be in this area now."

JM: Did you get a look at it yourself?

OE: I was just got a look at the wake of it, when the general quarters sounded and I had to go to my station on number one boiler.

JM: What did it look like?

OE: Well, it just looked like a, the top of the conning tower was showing and I had thought it was something being towed through the water, like an ashcan or something that was dragging along behind this barge from the ANTARES, the glimpse that I got.

JM: Was it, was it behind the barge or between the . . .

OE: Behind the barge.

JM: Behind the barge. And so you thought it was just another drill, then you saw it and you realized what it was. Did, Outerbridge didn't request permission, he just . . .

OE: He, he . . .

JM: . . . ordered for you to go for it?

OE: He shot first and then called in afterwards. Yes.

JM: So what was, what was going through the crew's mind, the first time it's ever been real and really fired a shot at it.

OE: Well, we didn't really know what was going on. When we were down in the fire room talking about it, the chief of the watch says that he thought it was some kind of spy submarine that was spying on Pearl Harbor and got in too close and got his conning tower up too far and we spotted it. But whether it was Japanese or German, or what it was, we didn't know.

JM: Was there, before this happened, was there a different scuttlebutt that submarines, or anybody, might try to get into the harbor and attack? Did you have any war talk?

OE: Well, at first, this patrol that we took was just an ordinary patrol, basically to keep ships out of that area. And we didn't darken ship at night or anything. But about a month or two before the Japanese attack, we were ordered to make this a war time patrol, and from then on, the dusk to dawn, there was no smoking outside. All of our portholes had to be sealed up, no lights shown at all on our ship. So we were actually more or less on a ready patrol from then on.

JM: What about when the *WARD* hit it, it took two shots. That's why I said gunnery, because that's good shooting, trying to hit it.

OE: Shall I call that a lucky shoot?

JM: You were there.

OE: At the, at the time, with this four-inch gun, we're doing twenty-five knots and the submarine was probably doing maybe only ten knots. And we were coming up on it at twenty-five knots, and we were only about a hundred yards away from it, so it was good shooting. The first shot just went over the conning tower, just missed it, from the number one, the number one gun. And the number three gun put a hole right through the conning tower. And then we went on past the front of the submarine and dropped four depth charges, and the submarine came up and rolled over, and went under. And then we continued, we were very close to shore by this time. We were heading right towards the shore, so we had to cut around the *ANTARES* and head back into Mamala Bay. So they were maneuvering pretty good then.

JM: Explain the rest of the morning.

OE: Well, from then on, I was up on topside then with the repair crew; it was sent up on topside when we saw the first planes come in. Then at this time, we were getting other soundings on submarines, so we were dropping depth charges all over Mamala Bay that morning. We dropped every depth charge we had on board ship. We ran out of 'em.

Then when the first planes came in and attacked Pearl Harbor, we saw the smoke and everything coming up from Hickam Field and Pearl Harbor, I went down in the fire room and informed the fire room crew that we were with Japan because we saw the big, red insignias on the planes. Two of 'em took a crack at the *WARD* and they straddled the *WARD* with bombs and missed us because we were moving. So they did attack us that morning, but they missed.

JM: Did the anti-aircraft crews, did they get off some pretty big response at your place?

OE: On our ship?

JM: Yeah.

OE: We weren't a very good ship for anti-aircraft at that time. That's why the four-inch guns were taken off right after December the seventh, because they could only elevate to forty-five degrees, and they put three-inch fifties on board. From then on, we had pretty good anti-aircraft. We had twenty millimeters and three point fives. But up until that time, we were still rigged for World War I action, anti-submarine and anti-surface. We carried twelve torpedoes on board the *WARD* and four-inch guns. But the four-inch guns were not good for anti-aircraft, and of course, later on, when they made us into an APD, they took the torpedoes off too, and we became an attack personnel destroyer.

JM: Describe, put it in words, what the attack on Pearl Harbor looked like from your vantage point outside the harbor, in Mamala?

OE: The first impression I got was that the attack was very successful because of all the black smoke. I think there was probably from the *ARIZONA* and some of the other ships, the *CASSIN* and the *DOWNES*, and the *PENNSYLVANIA*, or whatever it was, because there was just a column of black smoke going on up in the air a couple of thousand feet. Could have been seen all over, from all over the island, I believe.

JM: What were, what were your duties and -- just station keeping out there, or were you still sounding submarine contacts?

OE: Yes. We ended up dropping on 'em all of our depth charges and then we got permission to enter the harbor and get more ammunition and depth charges, because by that time, some of the ready duty destroyers from inside the harbor had exited the harbor and were out helping us on the anti-submarine duty then. I think the *MONAGHAN*, *MONAGHAN* was the first one out, I think.

JM: Had you, you just said that they joined you out there. Didn't they come out of the harbor pretty fast?

OE: Oh yeah. And we were very happy to see them. When they were coming out of the harbor entrance, all the guns were going and they were shooting, and this was the second wave of the Japanese attack, now, by this time. And they, when the destroyers came out, they were fully in full action by that time.

JM: About what time did you go in to reload the depth charges?

OE: Right after noon, about 12:30 or one o'clock. And when we entered the harbor, where we usually took a turn to the port and entered West Loch, to pick up the ammunition, we couldn't do that because the *NEVADA* had run aground there and firstly blocked the harbor exit, so we had to go around Ford Island and pull into West Loch. So we went all through the, the damaged areas and saw all the damage and . . .

JM: That must have been unnerving.

OE: Yes, it was, it was a bad, terrible sight. And then we couldn't stop and help anybody or anything, because our orders were to resupply the ship and get right back out on, on patrol, because we didn't know if the Japanese fleet was coming in or not.

JM: There was still a lot of burning oil burning around there.

OE: The oil was burning in spots and there were bodies in the water, and there were small boats running around, picking up people out of the water, but we went right through that whole thing and went around Ford Island, pulled into West Loch.

JM: How'd you feel at, towards, towards Japan?

OE: Well, we were so busy, you really don't start thinking about that until later on, because we were still at general quarters all this time. We didn't have any time off to start talking to each other and saying what a terrible deal it was or anything, so it wasn't until later on that it really hit home what had happened.

JM: Did you, you were out on station that night too?

OE: We stayed out then for several days, yes.

JM: Do you remember a group of planes trying to come in that night, the evening of December 7, land on Ford Island?

OE: Yes, but we were over towards Diamond Head at that time. No, we knew the planes were coming in and we heard over the radio that they were again shooting at enemy aircraft, but it wasn't. It was the *LEXINGTON*, *LEXINGTON* planes was it, or *SARATOGA*, *ENTERPRISE*?

JM: So did you know, had you had the word in advance that American carrier planes were going to be coming in? Some men apparently heard and some didn't.

OE: Not that I know of.

JM: How many times have you been back to visit Pearl Harbor since then?

OE: Just once, in 1978, and then now.

JM: What's it like after fifty years to come back to (inaudible) what kind of feelings go through your mind when you go out like to the Memorial and look at the harbor?

OE: Well, everything is so different and there were so many people here because it was the fiftieth, that we were in conversation with each other all the time. I was meeting more and more people that had been here and it was very interesting. And talking to the Japanese that were here too was interesting. I talked to four of 'em were on the bus with us today, and three of 'em were pilots that made the raid, Abe and -- what are the names of the others? I can't remember them.

JM: Matsumura . . .

OE: I had quite a long conversation with Abe -- is that how you pronounce it? And he said that one of the men in his flight, after he had dropped the, his bombs in Pearl Harbor, saw the *WARD* out there and took a swing out towards the *WARD* and was going to strafe us, but then he had orders to return to the ship, to rearm and come back. So he swung off and didn't make his attack on the *WARD*.

JM: Was it interesting to talk to these guys that were, you know . . .

OE: Yes, it is, he, you know, he . . . it was a sneak attack and of course, we certainly didn't like it, but he was following his orders, I suppose, and he, I asked him, I said, "Did you carry fire sidearms when you were piloting?"

And he says, yes, they always did. They always carried sidearms, and mostly to commit suicide, he said. He said, "If we were to be taken prisoner, our belief at that time was that we should take our own lives."

JM: The last question is sort of one that asks you go back a long ways. You were twenty years old then, that day, couldn't even vote yet, sitting right in the middle of everything. What's the most vivid memory that sticks out more than everything you saw that day?

OE: Well, as far as I was concerned, the most vivid memory was seeing that big, red rising sun on the planes that made the attack on the *WARD*. And of course, that was really the first that we knew that it was the Japanese and it was a real attack. Up until that time, we thought it could have been just some explosions or something, in the harbor, an accident or something. But when we

saw the Japs attack us, immediately everybody knew what it was, because we had been warned for several months that war was imminent in the Pacific. So as soon as we saw the rising sun on the planes, we knew what was happening.

JM: Did you think it would be you when war came?

OE: No, no. When we left home, it was a cruise in the Pacific, as far as we knew.

JM: I want to thank you very much for joining us today.

OE: The *WARD* went on, of course, and saw a lot of other action in the South Pacific. Then we were finally sunk on Ormoc Bay in the Philippines, exactly three years later, on December 7, 1944.

JM: Can you state real quick how long you were . . .

OE: I was on there all the time, yes.

JM: Is that where you made chief, on board?

OE: Made chief right after it, right after that.

JM: Proud of your ship?

OE: Oh yes.

JM: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Ethier.

OE: Okay, thank you.

JM: All right. Cool. Watch out for that.

END OF INTERVIEW